

1937.1.67 (67)

Portrait of an Elderly Lady

1633

Oil on canvas, 102.5 x 86.9 (40 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 34 $\frac{3}{16}$)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Inscriptions

At left of sitter's head: *AETAT SVAE 60 / AN^o 1633*

Technical Notes: The original support, a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric, has been lined with the original tacking margins trimmed. Part of the painting surface has been turned over the stretcher edges to form a new tacking margin, reducing the height by 3 cm and the width by 2.5 cm (see text). The x-radiograph shows only faint cusping along the top and left edges. Above the book at the juncture of the dress and arm is a large repaired hole and adjacent vertical tear.

Paint is applied over a thin, creamy white ground as a fluid paste, with impasto in thicker passages such as the brocade and book. The face and black dress are thinly glazed. Brushstrokes in the skirt and hands are left unblended, but the brocade, lace, ruff, and cap are painted with precision and restraint. Adjustments to the silhouette of the black drapery are visible to the naked eye. A cluster of small losses is found in the upper right corner, along with scattered small losses in the background and drapery, and a linear diagonal loss that passes through the proper left thumb. The painting has not been treated since its acquisition by the National Gallery.

Provenance: Jurriaans; (sale, Van de Schley, Roos, and De Vries, Amsterdam, 28 August 1817, no. 20); Cornelius Sebille Roos [1754–1820], Amsterdam. Charlotte-Camille, Comtesse Boucher de la Rupelle, Paris; (sold by 1905 to Charles Sedelmeyer, Paris); James Simon [1851–1932], Berlin, by 1906. (Duveen Brothers, London and New York; and Thomas Agnew & Sons, London, June to November 1919); (Duveen Brothers, London and New York); sold June 1920 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington; deeded 28 December 1934 to The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.

Exhibited: *Catalogue of 100 Paintings by Old Masters*, Sedelmeyer Gallery, Paris, 1905, 20, no. 13. *Ausstellung von Werken alter Kunst*, Kaiser-Friedrich Museum, Berlin, 1906, 18, no. 49. New York 1939, 86–87, no. 179. Washington 1989b, 262–263, no. 45, color repro., as *Portrait of a Seated Woman*.

ALTHOUGH THE NAME of the sitter in this impressive portrait is not known, Hals has inscribed her age, sixty, and the date of the painting, 1633, in the background on the left. The prayer book she holds in her right hand and her conservative black costume with its white millstone ruff collar clearly indicate her pious nature, yet Hals conveys far more about her through her face and hands than through her costume or book. With broad strokes of the brush he captures her lively, robust personality. Her self-con-

fidence is expressed in the twinkle of her eyes, in the firm grasp of her hand on the arm of the chair, and in the strong silhouette of her form against the light gray background.

This painting demonstrates the range in Hals' brushwork for commissioned portraits of the early 1630s. Of primary importance for him at this period of his career was projecting the three-dimensionality of the figure through strong modeling of the features. The form of the head is built up in planes of light that are accented with firm strokes in the highlights and shadows. The white cap and collar are carefully depicted, as the artist sought to project not only their detail but also their translucence. While he also articulated the design in the black jacket with great care, he indicated the folds of the skirt with comparatively free brushstrokes that suggest the flickering of light off its surface.

The woman's pose is adapted from a portrait Hals had executed two years earlier, *Cornelia Claesdr. Vooght* (fig. 2),¹ but the differences between these paintings are as remarkable as their similarities. By intensifying his light in the Washington painting, Hals has accented the woman's features and given her greater three-dimensional presence. He has augmented this effect by flattening the angle of her collar, shifting the position of her right hand so that it is turned more toward the viewer, and placing her in a low-backed chair to allow her form to be silhouetted against a light background. The result of these changes is that the personality of the woman in the Washington painting is projected in a remarkably forceful and direct manner.

Cornelia Claesdr. Vooght was the wife of the Haarlem burgomaster Nicolaes van der Meer, whose companion portrait Hals also painted in 1631 (fig. 1).² Following portrait conventions that had been developed by Peter Paul Rubens in the late 1610s, Hals juxtaposed a standing man with a seated woman.³ The pose of Nicolaes van der Meer, who rests one hand on the back of a chair and holds his gloves with the other, offers a clue to identifying a possible pendant to the Washington painting. It may well be the *Portrait of a Man* (fig. 3)⁴ in which the figure assumes a pose similar to Van der Meer's. The proposal, first advanced by Valentiner, has been a matter of some dispute.⁵ In 1974, Slive argued against it, largely because he dates the Frick painting 1628–1630. He also noted that their provenances and dimensions differ (the Frick painting measures 115.6 x 91.4 cm).⁶ In 1989, however, he noted that neither provenance extends back before the nineteenth century, and both works have been



Fig. 1. Frans Hals, *Nicolaes Woutersz. van der Meer*, 1631, oil on panel, Haarlem, Frans Halsmuseum



Fig. 2. Frans Hals, *Cornelia Claesdr. Vooght*, 1631, oil on panel, Haarlem, Frans Halsmuseum



Fig. 3. Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Man*, c. 1631, oil on canvas, New York, Frick Collection

trimmed, the Frick painting along the bottom and the Washington painting on all four sides.⁷ It is possible that the original format of these paintings approached that of the Haarlem ones, which are more vertical in shape.

Stylistically, there are arguments for placing the Frick man about 1633, despite the blond tonality of the painting that Slive rightly associates with works from the late 1620s. Here, as in the National Gallery picture, the figure boldly faces the viewer as light firmly models his features. His costume, particularly in the shoulder and sleeve design, is similar to that in the *Portrait of a Man*, 1633, now in the National Gallery, London.⁸ These works are also comparable stylistically, not only in the careful way in which the hair is delineated and in the broad, plain modeling of the face, but also in the bold strokes of the costume. Finally, one may also argue for the relationship of the Washington and Frick paintings in the way each of them varies from their prototype in the Haarlem pair. The hierarchical, frontal images of the burgomaster and his wife have given way to more informal poses in which the figures turn toward the viewer and communicate through their direct glances and smiling, open expressions, a suggestion, perhaps, of a different social status.⁹



Frans Hals, *Portrait of an Elderly Lady*, 1937.1.67

Notes

1. Slive 1970–1974, 3: cat. 78; 2: pl. 1240.
2. Slive 1970–1974, 3: cat. 77.
3. Pendant portraits by Rubens of *Peter van Hecke* and *Clara Fourment* (London art market), with the man standing and the woman seated, are illustrated in Rosenberg 1911, 172–173. These same paintings have been attributed unconvincingly to Van Dyck by Larsen 1980b, 1: nos. 25 and 26.
4. Frick Collection 1968, 1: 209, no. 10.1.69; Slive 1970–1974, 3: cat. 67.
5. The possible relationship of these paintings was first proposed in Valentiner 1921a, 108; and Valentiner 1936, no. 41; it was followed by Trivas 1941, 41.
6. Slive 1970–1974, 3: cat. 67. Grimm 1990, cat. 44, also dates the Frick painting about 1628.
7. Washington 1989b, 262, no. 45. The current tacking margins of *Portrait of an Elderly Lady* are covered with original paint. If they were flattened, the dimensions would be 105.6 x 89.4 cm. Since virtually no cusping of threads is visible along the edges, it seems probable that the image was still larger; its original size, however, cannot be determined. For a discussion of the original shape of the Frick painting see Frick Collection 1968, 1: 209–210, no. 10.1.69.
8. MacLaren 1960, no. 1251; Slive 1970–1974, 3: cat. 81.
9. Although no inscription appears on the Frick painting, it may have disappeared through abrasion; the background is quite thin. In Hals' companion portraits *Lucas de Clercq* and *Feyna van Steenkiste*, 1635 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. nos. c 556, c 557; Slive 1970–1974, 3: cats. 104, 105), only the woman's portrait bears a date.

References

- 1907–1927 HdG, 3 (1910): 108, no. 371.
1909 Moes: 108, no. 186.
1914 Bode and Binder: 1: 40, no. 138, pl. 79 (also English ed., Berlin, 1: 43, no. 138, pl. 79).
1921a Valentiner: 313, 103, 109, repro. (also 1923 rev. ed., 313, 109, repro.).
1930 Dülberg: 114.
1936 Valentiner: no. 41, repro.
1941 Trivas: 39, no. 41, pl. 59.
1941 Berenson and Valentiner: no. 191, repro.
1941 NGA: 94.
1965 NGA: 57, no. 67, repro.
1968 NGA: 65, no. 67.
1970–1974 Slive: 1 (1970): 115; 2 (1970): pls. 135, 138; 3 (1974): 42, 50, no. 82.
1972 Grimm: 90, 202, no. 69, 89, repro.
1974 Montagni: 97, no. 83, 96, repro., pl. 31 (also 1976 French ed.).
1975 NGA: 168, no. 67, 169, repro.
1976 Walker: 268, no. 350, repro.
1981 Baard: 57, fig. 60.
1984 Wheelock: 10, repro.
1985 NGA: 196, repro.
1986 Sutton: 308.
1989b Washington: 262–263, no. 45, color repro.
1990 Grimm: 168 color repro., 183, 279, no. 63, repro.
1992 NGA: 123, color repro.

1937.1.68 (68)

Portrait of a Member of the Haarlem Civic Guard

c. 1636/1638

Oil on canvas, 86 x 69 (33¼ x 27)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Technical Notes: The original support consists of a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric, with part of the original tacking margin incorporated into the top edge. In a past restoration, the top, left, and right tacking margins were trimmed, and these edges were extended with 1.5 cm wide fabric strips. The paint layer present on the extensions is neither original nor of recent application. The original fabric and extensions have been lined. Cusping is found along all edges of the original support, indicating that the present dimensions have not been greatly reduced.

Paint was applied over a smooth white ground in fluid pastes and thin washes, in unblended brushstrokes, dots, and dabs of low impasto. A red underlayer visible in some areas may be part of an overall or locally applied imprimatura. Colored glazes were used extensively in the drapery. Lining has emphasized the canvas weave and slightly flattened the paint texture. Apart from a small loss in the hat, losses are confined to the edges. The brown glazes of the face and hair and blue green paint of the landscape are moderately abraded, and the darks of the clothing slightly abraded. The painting was restored in 1991.

Provenance: Catherine II, empress of Russia [1729–1796], by 1774; Imperial Hermitage Gallery, Saint Petersburg; sold March 1931 through (Matthiesen Gallery, Berlin; P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., London; and M. Knoedler & Co., New York) to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington; deeded 30 March 1932 to The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.

Exhibited: Washington 1989b: not in catalogue.

WITH GREAT BRAVURA, this fashionably clad member of the Haarlem civic guard stands with arm akimbo, staring out at the viewer. His flamboyant character, evident in his stance but reinforced through his arched eyebrows, stylish mustache, beard, and long, flowing locks of hair, conveys the sense of pride the Dutch felt in their military prowess during the formative years of the republic. By the late 1630s, when Hals painted this image, the Dutch had clearly demonstrated their superiority over the Spanish forces that had attempted to stem the revolt against Spanish rule. Haarlem, in particular, had proven itself in the early years of the conflict when it had refused to capitulate to the Spanish siege that laid waste the city. Thanks to its citizens' endurance, when Haarlem finally succumbed in the summer of 1573, the northern forces had gathered